



# The Young Collector

By  
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## WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

In this column I would like to explore a few personal experiences that provide valuable lessons for young collectors as they purchase stamps. Undoubtedly, seasoned collectors have some stories to tell regarding what seemed, at the time, to be attractive buying opportunities; but, in the end, turned out to be 'too good to be true.'

Since I recently started a part-time job and have a little more disposable income, I made the decision to acquire items of higher caliber, and found there are certain steps to take that can ensure a better outcome. Of course, most of your searches will yield attractive items, but, some may not turn out to be what you hoped.

When you are scouting material online you need to be especially careful. For example, one Saturday morning, I was scrolling around on eBay looking for any stamp that caught my eye, and came across what I thought was a used number 12, three pence perforated Beaver being wrongly advertised as a number one. That immaculate stamp was gorgeous and well clear of the perforations. I suspected that this may be an incredible prospect, since a stamp of that quality is extremely rare, seldom offered for sale, and was obviously worth much more than listed. For a moment I thought I had discovered something really good.

In my excitement, I rushed to the phone and breathlessly dialed a good friend upon whose expertise I knew I could rely for sound advice. We were able to locate and examine the listing together. He warned me that the stamp I discovered was actually a fake. Interesting!

His proof was that the stamp was printed on laid paper instead of wove paper. My friend knew that the number 12 does not exist on laid paper! Therefore, it could not be real. Further, he noted the perforations, which made it appear to be a number 12 - the only other thing that distinguishes the two stamps - were oddly shaped, and would have been made with a pointed device like a pin. This stamp was, in fact, merely an overpriced example of a number one, altered to look like a number 12.

My friend warned me that the stamp was garbage, and not to touch it with a 10 foot pole. Caveat Emptor: buyers beware!

In addition to fakes, there are also some misnomers and various idiosyncrasies to keep in mind.

Ironically, the description VG or very good is a confusing classification since it does not mean that a stamp is in excellent condition, which is what the term sounds like. In fact, it means quite the opposite.

Knowledgeable collectors have instructed me that when you label a stamp as very good in your collection, it sticks out like a sore thumb and brings the value of everything else around it down. So, unless it is extremely rare or highly priced in top condition, it is generally best not to collect this grade of stamps.

I almost fell into this trap once, but received timely help from a friend. As I was about to bid on an early and rather expensive stamp of Great Britain marked VG, a gentleman kindly informed me of this misleading grade. On another occasion, I paid five dollars for what I thought was a 'nicely sealed,' very fine jumbo example of the Canadian two cent Registration Stamp, F one, with a light grid cancellation.



After I took it home, I realized it was torn right in the middle. The tear could only be seen from the back.

Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice shame on me!

So, let me give you some friendly advice. The moral of my story is: you should always examine the back of the stamp before you buy! Even online, most reputable sellers on eBay will provide scans of both the front and back of a stamp, though some will simply provide a warning to view the scan, without mentioning any damage - in that way avoiding later complaints if the buyer determines the stamp is defective. Many flaws, such as stains, toning, and creases are only visible from the (boring, but important) reverse side.

There are a few more idiosyncrasies and classification issues of which you should be aware. Most dealers are uniform in their classifications. Unfortunately, not everybody draws the same line between never hinged and hinged, lightly hinged and original gum, and all of the places in between.

Having purchased a 'mint, never hinged' War Tax pair on eBay, I anticipated the arrival with enthusiasm.

But when the stamps arrived, there was undisclosed gum adhesion and surprisingly, even rather large amounts of paper torn off the face of other stamps still attached on the backs. I was fortunate enough to get a refund from that private seller.



This was not a typical mistake. Buying from dealers has advantages compared with unknown sellers. And, if mistakes do occur, most dealers will thank a customer who kindly points out that one of their items is not as described, in order to avoid a bad review. You may also find a dealer

who is willing to help you look for something and give you useful information. Often dealers will acquire specific material to sell to individual customers based on what they have requested. While you may, at times, score a deal from private sales, dealers carry a greater volume of better and more reliable stock.

For collectors, information is valuable, and dealers can be a great source of information.

I have learned much from a dealer named Chris McFetridge, who impressed me by using a unique grading technique, and who also provides unmatched detail regarding his stamps on his website. His business, Brixton-Chrome, specialises in the popular areas of Canada and British West Africa stamps and postal history, and he has earned a 100 percent positive feedback rating from his customers.

McFetridge's grading scheme is based on the *Unitrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps* and is refined fur-

ther with a points system. The more points a stamp earns from its varying levels of quality in every aspect, the higher he grades it, and it is priced accordingly.

In the past, I have been frustrated while perusing some dealers' websites after they posted a large group featuring many examples of the same stamp. These items appear to have obviously different qualities of centerings and cancellations, and yet all were graded very fine and are confusingly listed at the same price!

With McFetridge, I won't find something that is 'too good to be true,' but I know I can rely upon his professionalism and honesty to make sure that I get exactly what I'm buying. He has taken time to help me understand what steps to take when I consider the quality of a stamp. A little help from your friends can go a long way. They can help you with general knowledge, and in their areas of speciality or expertise. It is fun to keep in touch with your stamp collecting friends and these relationships are enjoyable and rewarding for both you and them. ☒



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